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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 YAOUNDE 000179

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DEPT FOR AF/C, CA/VO, AND EEB  
EUCOM FOR J5-A AFRICA DIVISION AND POLAD YATES  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA ACTION OFFICERS

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TAGS: [CM](#) [CVIS](#) [KCOR](#) [KFRD](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: CAMEROON'S DIPLOMATS: IN THE COUNTRY'S DISSERVICE,  
FALLING DOWN ON THE JOB

REF: A. 1997 YAOUNDE 6690

[1](#)B. 94 YAOUNDE 1224

Classified By: P/E Officer Tad Brown for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) The recent death of Cameroon's long-serving Ambassador to the E.U. resparked recurring public and media commentary on Cameroon's dramatically stagnant diplomatic corps. More than a dozen Cameroonian ambassadors have occupied their positions for more than 10 years, several have been in place for over twenty years, and tired Cameroonian COMs are the Deans of the Diplomatic Corps in many important capitals. Cameroonians complain that, despite the pressing need for an energetic diplomatic corps to promote tourism and foreign investment, their diplomatic emissaries prioritize personal and political gain above any sense of national duty. A shake-up of postings has been rumored to be in the offing for some time now, and the main reason to believe the situation will improve is that it could not get much worse. While hope is in the air, this situation is a sad commentary on how things "work" in Cameroon -- a land where years can pass waiting for Biya's decisions to be taken -- and then implemented. End summary.

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And We Thought Four-Year Tours Were Too Long  
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[1](#)2. (C) Isabelle Bassong, Cameroon's Ambassador to Belgium and the European Union since 1988, died November 9, 2006 of complications related to cancer. Bassong's death again drew national attention to the unusually long tenures of Cameroonian diplomats. On the list of embassies with a COM in place more than 10 years: Washington, Rome, Addis Ababa, Bonn (not Berlin!), Beijing, Moscow, and London. Despite recurrent rumors of his recall (since at least 1997, ref A), Cameroon's Ambassador to the United States, Jerome Mendouga, continues to add to his nearly 13 years at his leafy residence off Rock Creek.

[1](#)4. (C) President Biya told Ambassador Marquardt nearly two years ago that he was replacing Mendouga, a process which continues to grind on without resolution. Indeed, Mengouga

spent three months in Yaounde in late 2006 literally waiting for Biya to call him in to discuss his future, but he never got the call and returned to Washington just before the holidays. Before he left, Mendouga confirmed to the Ambassador the rumor that he expects to be sent to London after Washington. (Mendouga's successor Paul Pondi was in Washington for more than 10 years, making the Pondi-Mendouga tenure one of the few to rival Ahidjo-Biya for longevity.)

15. (C) Mendouga's counterpart at the UN, Martin Belinga Eboutou, is a neophyte in comparison, having served only nine years in New York. Belinga, who served for only ten months as Biya's Director of Civil Cabinet (chief of Staff) before being sent to New York, gets generally high marks for his work there. Mendouga, for his part, is intelligent, sociable, and clued in, but seems averse to heavy lifting to advance important Cameroonian priorities, like qualifying for MCA.

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What Do Diplomats Do, Anyway?  
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16. (C) Globally, there is ample anecdotal evidence suggesting that Cameroon's diplomats have less interest in national or citizen services than in their private affairs. One Cameroonian employee at Post recounts an exchange that is not atypical: a Cameroonian Embassy official in Paris explained frankly that the Embassy was uninterested in him or any other Cameroonians whose parents were of no political consequence. In our own experience, the Cameroonian Embassy in Washington often is unable or unwilling to help with bread-and-butter Embassy responsibilities like arrangements

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for official visitors (who do not trust the Embassy to accomplish anything and so come to us for help).

17. (C) We know (and hear) little about working-level diplomats in Washington, but receive fairly frequent calls from the law firm hired to lobby on their behalf. It is also clear that there is little concept of a normal chain of command through the Foreign Ministry: ambassadors' allegiances are to various individuals in the government, and ultimately to Biya, which makes cohesive action elusive for the GRC. Ambassadors know that their only real boss is Biya; as long as he is satisfied (or at least not unhappy with them), their tenure is safe.

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DIPLOMATIC COVER FOR POLITICAL,  
PERSONAL MISSIONS AND VISA FRAUD  
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18. (C) A review of Consular records reveals that less than transparent factors might be at play in allocating precious postings at Western embassies (and that such shenanigans are not just the province of the Ministry of External Relations).

An A2 visa, for example, was issued in January 2006 to Yvette Doris Mbogba to represent the Ministry of Finance at Cameroon's Embassy in Washington, DC. Mbogba was joined by her daughter, her niece and a domestic servant. Her boss at the Finance Ministry, Finance Minister Polycarpe Abah Abah, is also the father of her child. Abah Abah's wife, Caroline Abah Abah, and daughter Josiane, have also served in the Ministry of Finance but have not yet been assigned overseas. Officials with the British High Commission in Yaounde have told us privately that they have begun to refuse visa cases recommended by Cameroon's High Commissioner in London after determining that many applicants were improperly given official cover.

19. (C) UN Ambassador Martin Belinga is also well known to the consular section for needing to replace drivers and other domestic help on a regular basis. The Department is still considering a special advisory opinion request on a visa

application submitted by a relative of Belinga who was recruited as a cook. In addition, an Embassy Yaounde initiative to eliminate reciprocal visa fees, which would be very advantageous to Cameroonian travellers and help promote trade, investment, and tourism toward Cameroon, seems to have faltered on the fact that the Cameroonian Embassy in Washington depends on visa fees for its operating budget.

¶10. (U) Another problem is the failure of the GRC to replace ambassadors who die or leave their posts. Philomen Yang was High Commissioner in Ottawa "for 20 years and 8 months" before he was named a Minister at the Presidency in December, 2004; the post has remained vacant ever since. Cameroon's sensitive relationship with Nigeria is hampered by the fact that there has been no High Commissioner there for 15 years. The last Charge d'Affaires left Abuja in November, ¶2005. Nigeria is pressing the GRC to name one, as part of improving relations since the Bakassi issue was resolved last June and in keeping with an agreement the two countries made at the time, but that nomination seems caught up in the overall reshuffle being prepared. The only movement at the COM level in recent years, in fact, was the transfer to Paris of the Ambassador in Tokyo after the death of the incumbent in Paris in early 2006; the Tokyo slot remains vacant. At the time of his death last year, Cameroon's Ambassador to Paris had been there for almost 11 years.

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COMMENT: PLUS CA CHANGE...  
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¶11. (C) We continue to hear rumors that President Biya will soon announce a shake-up of at the top of Cameroon's diplomatic missions. Last year saw a rotation at the DCM level, the first in years. Foreign Minister Mebara recently announced a "Conference of Ambassadors" -- which would be the first time in two decades that Cameroonian Ambassadors return to Yaounde to meet and discuss together. Mebara told the Ambassador that the rotation of Ambassadors must occur before

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the Conference, so, despite his high-profile announcement, it is obviously not imminent. Cameroon needs an energetic diplomatic corps to lobby for much needed foreign investment, tourism and other objectives. We will do our best to remain optimistic that the new team, when announced, will be up to the challenge. One worrying sign, however, is the GRC's reaction to filling the vacant slot in Brussels, showing once again that form takes precedence over substance. Mebara confided to the Ambassador that Bassong would have been replaced, but as a result of her death, naming the slate of new ambassadors had to be postponed; it would be insulting to her family, he said, to move "too swiftly". End comment.  
MARQUARDT